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#6
ROSE
MEREDITH FINCH • IG GUARA

The Story So Far...

In the land of Ttereve, magical ability is a death sentence. Rose's village is destroyed and her mother killed when Queen Drucilla senses the emergence of a new magical power in her kingdom. Convinced that the queen is behind her loss, Rose embarks on a quest for vengeance and soon encounters a band of rebels with their own agenda.

Together at last, Rose and Thorne manage to drive off Drucilla's Fallen, but their victory is not without cost. Thorne now wears a magical collar that prevents him from bonding with Rose and blocks his connection to the land and its power.

In Millhaven the rebels, led by Will, prepare to defend the city from Drucilla's army. Is the rebellion over before it even begins? Find out now in the gripping finale of the first arc of ROSE.

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THE GATES OF MILLHAVEN.
ARCHERS!
FIRE!

RESISTANCE HAS BEEN UNEXPECTEDLY FIERCE, YOUR MAJESTY. WE NEED TO FALL BACK AND REGROUP.
YOU EXPECT ME TO BELIEVE THAT YOUR TRAINED WARRIORS ARE ABOUT TO BE DEFEATED BY AN ARMY OF FARMERS AND SHOPKEEPERS?
THE TOWNSPEOPLE ARE FIGHTING FOR THEIR LIVES...
IF IT'S MOTIVATION OUR TROOPS NEED...

"...THEN I'LL GIVE IT TO THEM."
YOU SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN THE CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE.
LET ME SEE WHAT I CAN DO TO REMIND YOU.
BRING THE CHILD.
SNIFF I WANT MY DADDY!
LIZZIE! NO!
THAT'S MY LIZZIE! LEMME THROUGH, DAMN IT!

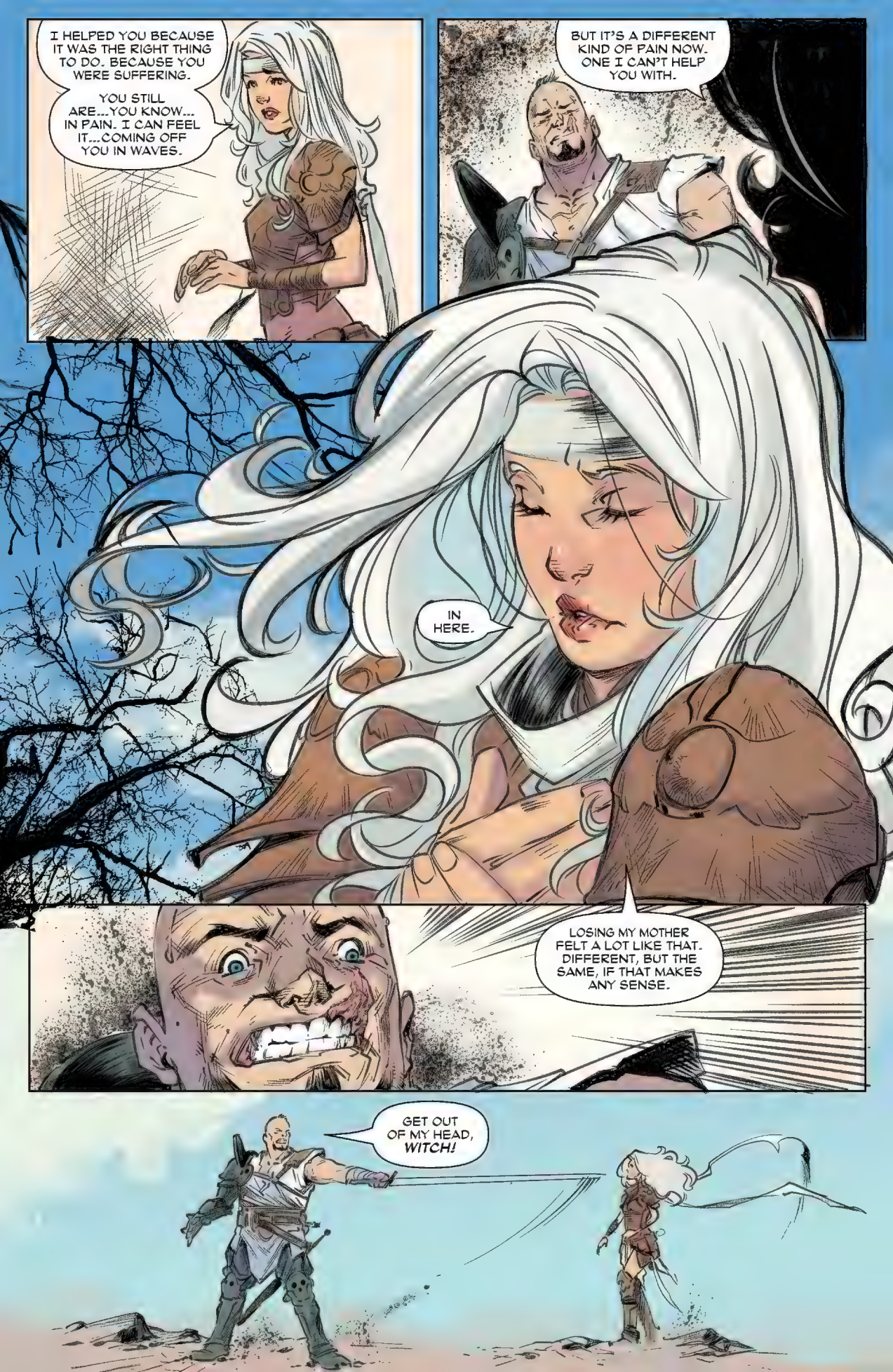
TSK, TSK...SO MUCH FUSS. YOU REALLY HAVE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, MY GOOD MAN.
PLEASE, QUEEN DRUCILLA... YOUR MAJESTY. I'LL DO ANYTHING! LIZZIE... SHE...SHE'S ALL I GOT LEFT IN THIS WORLD.
LET THE GIRL GO TO HER FATHER.
DADDY!
COME TO PAPA, LIZZIE. YOU HEARD THE QUEEN. EVERYTHING'S GOING TO BE OKAY.

NEVER LET IT BE SAID THAT I, QUEEN DRUCILLA, AM NOT COMPASSIONATE.
I WOULD NEVER DENY A FATHER AND HIS DAUGHTER...
...THE RIGHT TO DIE TOGETHER.
"WE ATTACK AGAIN IN AN HOUR. DO NOT FAIL ME AGAIN."

UGGGHHH...
FINALLY YOU'RE AWAKE. I WAS STARTING TO WORRY.
HERE... TRY TO DRINK SOME OF THIS.
PTUO PTUO
POISON?! IF YOU WANTED ME DEAD, YOU SHOULD HAVE JUST LET ME DIE WHEN YOU HAD THE CHANCE.
SORRY. I KNOW IT'S A LITTLE BITTER, BUT JUNIPER'S GOOD FOR THE BLOOD, AND IT'S ALL I COULD FIND. I'VE NEVER USED MAGIC TO HEAL ANYONE BEFORE AND I WANTED TO MAKE SURE...
WHAT HAVE YOU DONE! YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO LET ME DIE!
BETTER TO BE DEAD THAN TAINTED BY YOUR GUARDIAN MAGIC.
I DIDN'T... I MEAN...I WASN'T TRYING TO USE MAGIC... BUT WITH FINDING THORNE... AND FIGHTING THOSE DEMON THINGS...AND...AND YOU DYING... SOMETHING JUST CAME OVER ME.
GRRRRR

IF THE KNIGHT STILL WISHES TO DIE...IT CAN BE ARRANGED.
WHAT IN THE NAME OF...?!
THORNE! THAT'S NOT NICE.
WHERE'S MY SWORD?!
NOW LOOK WHAT YOU'VE DONE.
OUT OF THE WAY, GIRL.
I WILL SEND THIS FOUL BEAST BACK TO THE HELL FROM WHICH HE WAS SPAWNED.
PLEASE. I PROMISE, NO ONE WANTS TO HURT YOU. I'M ROSE, AND THIS... BEAST IS THE KHAT, THORNE.
PLEASE.
YOU'RE SAFE NOW. WITH US.

IF MEMORY SERVES, QUEEN DRUCILLA OFFERED A REWARD FOR INFORMATION ABOUT A CREATURE MATCHING THE DESCRIPTION OF THAT... KHAT. BEEN ALMOST TEN YEARS AGO NOW.
WHAT DID YOU SAY ITS NAME WAS AGAIN? THRONE?
RRRRRRRRRRR
IT'S THORNE, AND I WOULDN'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT. THE FIRST TIME I SAW THORNE WAS WHEN WE RESCUED HIM FROM THOSE FALLEN THINGS.
YOU COULD HAVE RUN. WHY DID YOU HELP ME? I WAS GOING TO TURN YOU OVER TO DRUCILLA.
WHO'S TO SAY I WON'T STILL?


I HELPED YOU BECAUSE IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO. BECAUSE YOU WERE SUFFERING.
YOU STILL ARE...YOU KNOW... IN PAIN. I CAN FEEL IT...COMING OFF YOU IN WAVES.
BUT IT'S A DIFFERENT KIND OF PAIN NOW. ONE I CAN'T HELP YOU WITH.
IN HERE.
LOSING MY MOTHER FELT A LOT LIKE THAT. DIFFERENT, BUT THE SAME, IF THAT MAKES ANY SENSE.
GET OUT OF MY HEAD, *WITCH!*

CAPTURING YOU AND YOUR BEAST WOULD GUARANTEE MY RETURN TO THE QUEEN'S FAVOR.
I CAN'T IMAGINE HOW MUCH IT HURT, LEARNING THE PERSON YOU LOVE WANTS YOU DEAD.
I...

WHAT ARE YOU...?
I AM IN YOUR DEBT.
YOU COULD HAVE LEFT ME TO DIE.
AND... IF OUR ROLES WERE REVERSED...
...I WOULD HAVE LEFT YOU.
OR WORSE.
PLEASE.

BE AT PEACE, SIR KNIGHT. ALL IS FORGIVEN.

I, SIMON MAXWELL DANTE, DO THIS DAY SWEAR TO GUARD AND PROTECT YOU...
...WITH MY LIFE AND TO THE BEST OF MY ABILITY, UNTIL THE LIFE DEBT I OWE YOU IS REPAID.
THANK YOU. I ACCEPT YOUR GIFT.
BEWARE, ROSE. SOME GIFTS, LIKE THE KNIGHT'S SWORD, ARE DOUBLE-EDGED.
LET US HOPE THAT ONE DAY YOU DON'T NEED PROTECTION FROM THE PROTECTOR.

MILLHAVEN: INSIDE THE CITY.
HOLD THE GATE!
WE NEED MORE WOOD TO BRACE THE DOORS!
I DON'T GET IT! WE HAD THEM! WHAT'S CHANGED?
IT WOULD APPEAR...
...THAT WE ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES...
"...FIGHTING FOR THE LIVES OF LOVED ONES TODAY."

I'M FAILING, ILA.

IF THE PURPOSE WAS TO DEFEAT DRUCILLA, THEN I WOULD AGREE. YOU MUST CONSIDER WHAT YOU ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH HERE.

I'M TRYING TO SAVE THE PEOPLE OF MILLHAVEN, DAMN IT!
BAM

I'M TRYING TO SAVE THE PEOPLE OF MILLHAVEN.

BRING BJARKE AND FEL HERE. NOW!

I JUST GOT AN IDEA.

I HAVE NEVER KNOWN A GUARDIAN TO HAVE A CHAMPION. USUALLY A KHAT WOULD BE CONSIDERED ENOUGH OF A COMPANION.
≺SIGH≻ BUT THEN, THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A GUARDIAN LIKE YOU BEFORE EITHER.
I KNOW YOU DON'T TRUST HIM. BUT HE NEEDS ME. I JUST...I CAN FEEL IT.
WHAT IS SHE...HE... THE CREATURE SAYING?
HE SAYS THERE'S NEVER BEEN A GUARDIAN LIKE ME BEFORE.
I GUESS IT'S HARD TO ARGUE WITH THAT. I'M NOT EXACTLY WARRIOR MATERIAL.
YOU UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF.
YOU HAVE SHOWN YOURSELF TO BE BOTH A BRAVE AND CANNY FIGHTER.
PERHAPS HE REFERS NOT TO YOUR INEXPERIENCE...

I STILL CAN'T BELIEVE THAT THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A FEMALE GUARDIAN BEFORE!
THE RESPONSIBILITY OF PROTECTING THE KINGDOM HAS ALWAYS BEEN...
STOP! SOMETHING'S WRONG.
WHAT IS IT, THORNE?
≈SNIFF≈ SMOKE. A LOT OF IT. SOMETHING BIG IS BURNING.
I CAN SMELL IT NOW, TOO, BUT I DON'T SEE ANYTHING.
THERE. IT'S COMING FROM THE DIRECTION OF MILLHAVEN.

HOLD 'ER, MEN!
BJARKE. IT IS TIME.

SOB
SNIFF
SOB I WAN' MY MOMMY!
KEEP IT DOWN! BUNCH OF SNOT-NOSED...
MMMFFFF!
HELLO THERE, LITTLE ONE. I AM ILA. WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
T...T... TIMOTHY.
COULD YOU DO SOMETHING FOR ME, TIMOTHY?
COULD YOU GATHER UP THE CHILDREN AND TELL THEM IT IS TIME TO GO HOME? YOU MUST BE QUICK AND QUIET THOUGH, TIMOTHY. WE DO NOT WANT THE QUEEN TO HEAR US.
BJARKE. TAKE THE CHILDREN, AND MEET UP WITH WILL. I WILL DO WHAT I MUST TO ENSURE THAT YOU ARE NOT FOLLOWED.

THAT'S EVERYONE.
HOW'D YA COME UP WITH THE IDEA OF FLAMING THE TOWN ANYWAY?
WHEN I REALIZED THAT DEFEATING DRUCILLA WITH AN ARMY OF MERCHANTS AND FARMERS WAS NEVER THE GOAL.
WE GOT EVERYONE OUT SAFELY. THAT'S WHAT MATTERS.
"HAS ANYONE SEEN BJARKE OR ILA?"

AIEEEE!
HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?!
WITH THE CHILDREN GONE, ANY LEVERAGE WE HAD OVER THE MEN IS GONE.
KILL THEM ALL! THEY ARE LESS THAN USELESS TO ME NOW.
IF THAT IS YOUR WISH, HIGHNESS...
...BUT I WORRY THAT LEAVING BEHIND A DEAD ARMY WOULD LEAD SOME TO BELIEVE WE SUFFERED A CATASTROPHIC DEFEAT AT THE HANDS OF A FEW PEASANTS. WE MIGHT HAVE MORE UPRISINGS ON OUR HANDS.
AND WHAT WOULD YOU SUGGEST INSTEAD, LILITH?
LET THE MEN BELIEVE THE CHILDREN HAVE BEEN SENT AHEAD...THEY ARE EASILY DEALT WITH ONCE WE ARE WITHIN THE CASTLE WALLS.
AND WE CELEBRATE OUR VICTORY WITH A PUBLIC EXECUTION. ONE THAT STRIKES AT THE VERY HEART OF THE REBELS.

THEIR LEADER.
NEXT MONTH:
THE RISE OF A GUARDIAN

COMING SOON

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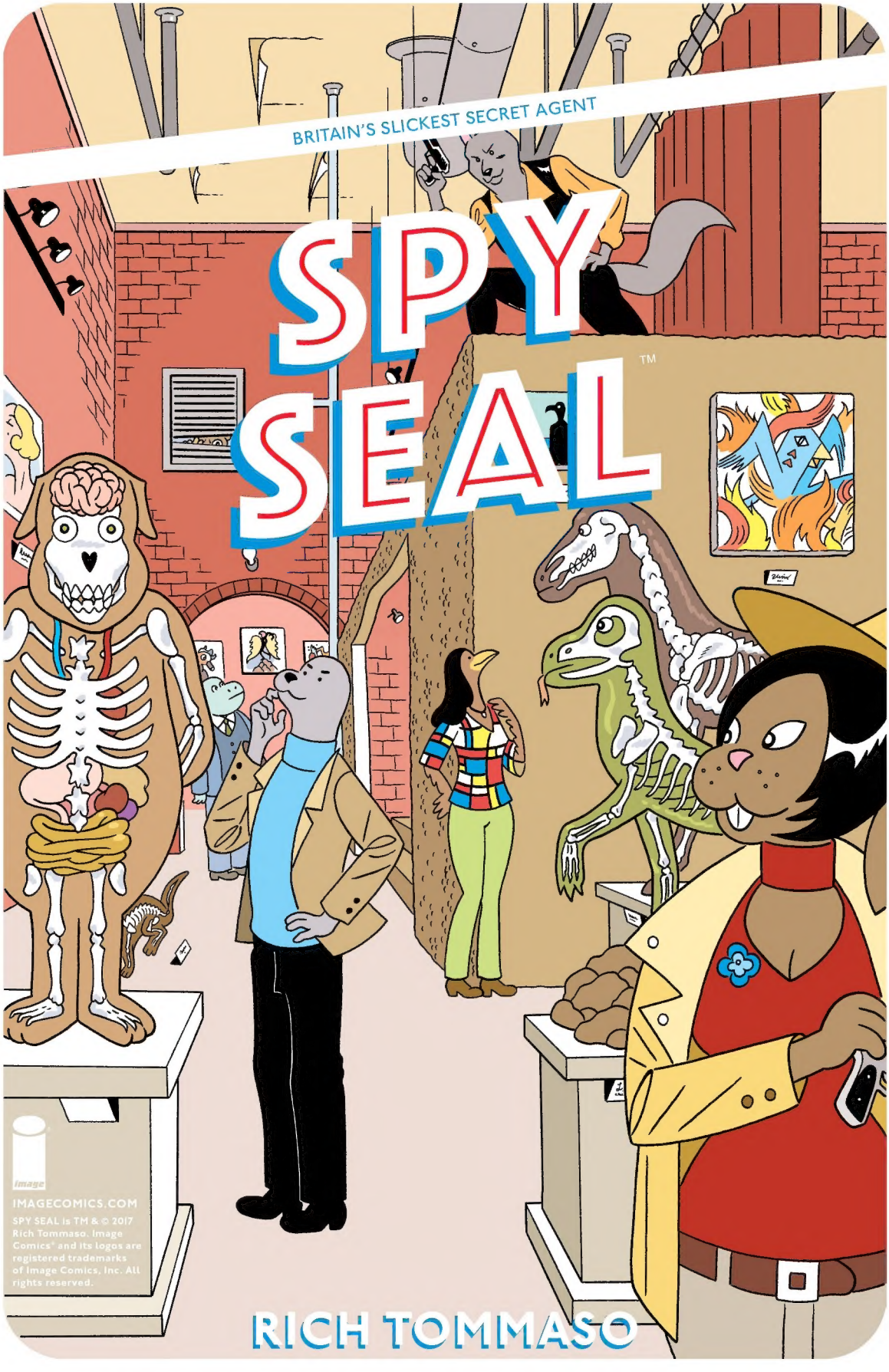

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